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November 27, 2007

Minerals Management Service to Model Ocean Circulation in Bering Sea

“Two-Year Study to Document Ocean Currents”

WASHINGTON— The Department of the Interior’s Minerals Management Service (MMS) has contracted with Rutgers University, with the assistance of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, to modify an ice-ocean circulation model for Alaska’s Bristol Bay.

“Understanding the circulation within Bristol Bay will be important for us as we evaluate a possible oil and gas lease sale in the offshore waters of the North Aleutian Basin,” said MMS Regional Director John Goll.

The contract consists of adapting an existing ice-ocean circulation model of the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska to the specific oceanographic conditions within Alaska’s Bristol Bay. Rutgers will use the Regional Ocean Modeling System (ROMS), which has a significant peer-reviewed record of use in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea. The modeling study began this fall and will continue for two years.

The study has four main objectives:

1. Modify the existing model to increase its predictive skill in Bristol Bay
2. Compare model predictions to field observations using oceanographic data within Bristol Bay and surrounding waters
3. Provide model results (wind, ice, and surface water speed and direction and extent of ice cover) to MMS as a 1986-2006 hindcast simulation.
4. Document the study results through a model manual, final report, and publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

An oil and gas lease sale in the North Aleutian Basin is proposed for 2011 in the MMS 2007-2012 5-Year Program. MMS scheduled the sale late in the program to allow sufficient time to supplement existing environmental data for environmental analyses. Under this schedule, exploratory drilling and related operations would not begin until 2012 or later.

Relevant Websites: www.mms.gov/alaska

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R-07-3752